districts of India and Nepal, to prevent misuse of the open India-Nepal border for activities directed against India. On their part, the Government of Nepal have assured that their territory would not be used for activities inimical to India's interest and have been extending their cooperation to the Government of India in this regard.

Russian pressure on the release of accused in the Purulia Arms drop case

1320. SHRI P. PRABHAKAR REDDY:
SHRI SWARAJ KAUSHAL:
SHRI KRISHNA KUMAR BIRLA:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that during his visit to Russia in June, 2000, he has committed to the Russian Government that India would review the cases of four Russian pilots lodged in Calcutta jail convicted in the Purulia arms drop case;

(b) if so, what were the compelling reasons for giving this commitment to review the cases of those who were sentenced to life imprisonment by judicial authority; and

(c) the final decision of law in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI AJIT KUMAR PANJA): (a) to (c) The Russian leadership had at various levels raised the issue of pardon/clemency for the pilots. The family members of the crew had appealed for mercy. The State Duma of the Russian Federation (Lower House of the Russian Parliament) had adopted a Statement on February 9, 2000 seeking mercy to allow the convicted pilots to return home. The Government of India maintained that this case would be decided and a lasting solution found within the four corners of Indian law.

Taking into consideration the strength of Indo-Russian relations, which are time tested and are being consolidated into a strategic partnership, as also the humanitarian dimensions of the problem, and after careful consideration and in pursuance of powers conferred under Article 72 of the Constitution of India, the President of India was pleased to remit, with immediate effect, the unexpired sentence of imprisonment of the five Russian pilots.

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